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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (11/18): AMERICA'S HONEYMOON PERIOD

Main Stories:

The three papers lead with statements by Palestinian Authority President Abbas after his meeting with Israel's Premier Olmert on November 17 in Jerusalem. Olmert promised Abbas to release 250 Palestinian prisoners in early December to coincide with the Islamic Eid al Adha holiday. Al Hayat Al Jadida notes that 11,000 Palestinians are in Israeli detention. The papers also report that Olmert promised to freeze 3,000 demolition orders against Palestinian houses located throughout the West Bank. Al Quds adds that Abbas demanded Olmert halt all Israeli settlement activities in the West Bank and urged him to work on sustaining the ceasefire with Hamas and lifting the Gaza "siege." Al Ayyam reports that the meeting did achieve agreement on the return of Palestinians who were deported to Gaza by the Israeli Military after participating in the Church of the Nativity stand-off in 2002. They will return to the West Bank. Al Hayat Al Jadida publishes a photo of Abbas and Olmert with their teams at the Jerusalem meeting.

Front pages highlight a second story about Palestinian Authority President Abbas' meeting with British Foreign Minister Miliband in Ramallah on November 17. In a press Conference with Miliband, Abbas stated that, "partial agreements [with Israel] are not acceptable. The only agreement to be made is a comprehensive peace deal." Miliband reiterated a theme underscored at the Quartet meeting in Egypt, that negotiations are irreversible. He called on Israel to halt settlement activities and expected that 2009 will be a "very important year," especially in light of the incoming U.S. administration, and new Israeli government, and the ongoing peace efforts by Abbas. Miliband added that UK laws prohibit favoring products made in Israeli settlements. The three papers publish front page photos of the two leaders in Ramallah.

Al Quds' front page reports statements made to AP by Palestinian Authority (PA) Prime Minister Fayyad. Speaking before his November 17 meeting with British Foreign Minister Miliband, Fayyad called on the E.U. to tighten restrictions on Israeli settlement products. Fayyad continued that while the PA has thus far only made the demand informally, the time has come to make an official request for such restrictions, adding that peace talks have collapsed under the pressure of Israeli settlement expansion. The paper notes that Miliband has been lobbying E.U. countries to restrict Israeli settlements products.

Al Hayat Al Jadida's front page publishes, under a lead photo of an Israeli tank near Gaza statements made by Israeli Defense Minister Barak that he is not ruling out the option of military action against the Gaza Strip. The paper also quotes Israel's Foreign Minister Livni stating that truce in Gaza has collapsed and blamed Hamas for the collapse. Al Ayyam's front page reports that Palestinians in Gaza fired homemade rockets on Israeli towns, with two rockets hitting the southern Israeli city of Sderot.

Al Quds' front page reports that Israel allowed for the entry of limited humanitarian assistance into Gaza. Thirty trucks crossed into the Strip to deliver humanitarian assistance.

Al Ayyam and Al Hayat Al Jadida front page statements by Hamas leader Haniyyah stating that Egypt's efforts for achieving internal Palestinian unity have not failed and that Egypt is following up on those efforts. Haniyah also highlighted the efforts of Arab League Secretary General Amr Musa as proof of continuing Arab support to internal Palestinian dialogue.

JERUSALEM 00002052 002 OF 002

Al Ayyam and Al Hayat Al Jadida's front pages report on statements made by Palestinian Authority (PA) Information Minister Riyad Al Malki warning against an escalation of Israeli actions in Gaza and calling for parties to respect the existing truce there. Al Malki's statements came following the weekly Palestinian Authority cabinet meeting on November 17. Al Malki added that his government has achieved success at the security level and continues to work for greater law enforcement in the southern West Bank, building on success in the north.

The Ma'an news network website reports that U.S. Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs James K. Glassman and Palestinian Authority Minister of Youth and Sports Abu Daqqah inaugurated the first Palestinian Center for Youth Development Resources in Beita village near Nablus in the West Bank on November 17. Mr. Glassman said that he will never forget the sight of Palestinian children at the event and added that the project was an initiative by Secretary of State Rice to give hope and encourage development opportunities for Palestinian youth, while also assisting them to achieve peace.

BLOCK QUOTES:

1) Columnist Rajab Abu Sarayah opines in Al Ayyam under the title, "Palestine, a victim of regional polarization" (11/18):
"Palestinians [should] craft their way to freedom by disengaging from financial dependence... and should join the regional systems [such as]... the Arab League and the Organization of the Islamic Conference countries... this option would require a vigorous struggle on the part of all Palestinians, not just those living in the West Bank and Gaza or those divided and polarized by Fatah and Hamas."

2) Jamil Matar writes in Al Quds under the title "America is in a honeymoon period with the world" (11/18): "With Obama's victory, [the world's] people have begun to lean towards loving America and shy away from hating it. America has started, or should start, the journey of changing its policies and behaviors and begin preparing itself for a growing revolution in international expectations."

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